

PN3 Parent's Corner



News You Can Use

Families and caregivers have a lot to think about when it comes to raising their children and trying to give them a good life. You may not realize that every day, government is making policy decisions that can impact your ability to achieve hopes and dreams for your family. That's why it's important for family voices to be represented in these decision-making processes. This newsletter will make it easier for you to know when and how to do that, and to access resources and supports for your family.

To make sure you keep receiving this valuable information, [please sign up to receive our bi-monthly email newsletter](#) direct to your inbox!



PA Passes State Budget but Doesn't Take Into Account Family Needs

As prenatal-to-three advocates, we have expressed disappointment in the shortsighted nature of the FY 2021-22 spending plan for Pennsylvania. While policymakers made clear that stimulus funds would not be used for recurring costs and generally preferred a more cautious approach in distributing the funding over a longer period, the budget package offers little infusion of these funds when they are needed most, and fails to outline a plan to offer assurances for families on how remaining stimulus funds will be used appropriately to improve their lives in future budgets.

Areas of note in the budget package include:

- Level-funding for the state's two child care line items in the budget (Child Care Services/Child Care Administration). Our child care focused [Start Strong PA](#) campaign was not asking for an increase in state funds but rather was focused on the allocation of federal stimulus funding. Funds were allocated for the full \$729 million appropriation in American Rescue Plan Child Care Stabilization funds, largely driving them out according to previously set federal guidance, except for additional, one-time program funding allotted for providers serving infants and toddlers. This falls short of language sought by the Start Strong PA campaign, which aimed to add recommendations gleaned from the series of virtual forums across the state from providers, parents, and advocates on how to allocate the federal funds.
- No state funding increase for voluntary, evidence-based home visiting. The campaign focused on increasing access to home visiting services, [Childhood Begins at Home](#), was advocating for a \$6.3 million increase in the budget.
- An increase of \$5.5 million in funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- No increase in funding for the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), which the federal government fully funds in Pennsylvania and does not have a separate, state-funded line item. [Thriving PA](#), our campaign focused on perinatal and children's health supports, including nutrition and improving enrollment rates in the WIC program, recently released a policy brief on solutions to improve and modernize WIC.
- Early Intervention Part C received an increase of \$22.18 million in state funds.
- American Rescue Plan funds Pennsylvania received include:

- Child Care Discretionary Funding - \$455 million
 - Child Care Stabilization Funding - \$729 million
 - Child Care Entitlement Funding - \$18 million
 - Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding for evidence-based home visiting - \$1.3 million
 - Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention - \$8.7 million
 - Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act - \$3.5 million
 - Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) - \$13.6 million specific to enhanced benefit package (there are additional funds nationally for modernization booked at \$390 million).
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Thriving PA Launched the Lead Free Promise Project to Bring Awareness to Harmful Lead Poisoning Impacting Children

Last month, the Lead Free Promise Project (LFPP) officially launched a nonpartisan coalition advocacy campaign to end lead paint poisoning across Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of the Department of Human Services, Meg Snead, along with 38 organizations committed to leading the effort to combat lead paint poisoning, joined the launch to announce the goals of the coalition. The goals include creating a state fund for low-income homeowners and landlords to remove lead paint-based hazards in properties and passing legislation requiring all children under two-years-old to be screened for lead poisoning.

You can view the Lead Free Promise Project website [here](#) which has various resources on lead poisoning and updates on the work of the coalition.



Don't Miss Out on a Benefit to Help Working Parents Pay for the Costs of Raising Children!

In order to help offset the cost to working parents of raising children, the American Rescue Plan Act, passed by Congress and signed by President Biden earlier this year, increased the amount of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) for 2021 to \$3,600 per qualifying child under the age of 6 and \$3,000 per qualifying child under the age of 18.

The American Rescue Plan Act also authorized the IRS to send eligible families periodic advance payments of their 2021 CTC. This will help put money into the pockets of hardworking parents sooner. From July through December 2021, eligible families should expect to receive advance payments totaling up to one-half of the full CTC amount for which they are eligible this year. Families will receive the remainder of their CTC when they file their 2021 tax return. Also, if a family's income tax bill is less than the amount of their Child Tax Credit, they will get a payment for the difference.

If you filed taxes in 2020, you should automatically receive the CTC payments described here. If you did not earn enough to file taxes in 2020, [please use this tool to sign up](#) for the Child Tax Credit.

If you had additional children in 2021, you can [report and update your information here](#). This link can also be used to decline advance payments and update bank account information for advance payments.

Use Your Voice to Tell Congressional Lawmakers – Invest in Young Children!

For many years, the high cost and limited supply of child care and preschool across the country have created insurmountable challenges for too many families. The existing structure of America's child care market is unsustainable. Most parents can't afford the high cost of care. Half of Americans live in an area without quality care options at all. And providers can only charge what families in their area can afford, which often translates into near-poverty wages for early educators and ultimately an untenable business model as a whole.

Decisions are being made in Washington, D.C. which will determine whether Congress will pass a major investment in America's early childhood education system. There are lots of priorities competing for a limited amount of funds, and it's important for parents to advocate for their young children. You can:

1. [Call](#) or [email](#) your Senator and Representative.
 2. Engage in advocacy [via your social media accounts](#).
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Thriving PA Releases WIC Policy Brief That Encourages Modernization of the Program to Increase Participation

Through [Thriving PA's](#) work related to the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), advocates – led by Allies for Children – developed a [policy brief](#) that provides recommendations to policymakers and the Department of Health on improvements to reverse the declining participation in WIC in the state. From 2016 to 2020, WIC enrollment declined by 21% or 50,000 enrollees in Pennsylvania. Continued declines in enrollment impact the amount of federal funding the program receives, thus creating fewer resources for WIC agencies to engage and serve eligible participants.

Some of the recommendations in the brief include:

- Technology improvements, including making permanent the benefits seen from implementing telehealth provisions through the pandemic and developing a mobile app.
- Coordination and partnerships through strategies like co-location of WIC clinics with other critical services like birthing hospitals and health clinics and implementing adjunctive eligibility – which streamlines the eligibility process when a family is already eligible for benefits like Medicaid or SNAP.
- Certification, eligibility, and targeted outreach efforts, including looking at policies included in current federal legislation to extend postpartum eligibility to two years and extending infant certification periods for two-year spans.

Along with our partner advocates in the Thriving PA campaign, we look forward to working with the Department of Health and policymakers at the state and federal levels to increase WIC participation in Pennsylvania and provide women, infants, and children opportunities for healthy nutrition.



Start Strong PA Harnesses Parent and Provider Feedback to Advocate for How Federal Child Care Funds will be Invested in Pennsylvania

Start Strong PA held 12 virtual forums, posted a survey, and gathered feedback from more than 1,000 individuals, including parents, with ideas about how federal child care funds should be used to stabilize access and affordability of child care, which is essential to Pennsylvania's working parents.

At over half of the 12 virtual forums conducted across PA, we heard that ARP Act funds should be used to provide financial assistance to families. Even prior to the pandemic, families needed help paying for high-quality child care. Of the children under age five in Pennsylvania who are eligible for child care subsidy, 81 percent are unserved and 85 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are unserved. This assistance could include strategies such as covering the cost of copays for Child Care Works families.

Also highlighted was the importance of helping families, including families of color, families from rural communities and families facing language barriers to increase awareness and understanding of Pennsylvania's quality rating system (STARS).

Other recommended strategies include payment model changes to stabilize child care providers, and improving recruitment and retention of child care teachers by providing extra payments to providers who serve children in the Child Care Works program, and those payments can be used only for retaining staff and recruiting new staff.

Since Pennsylvania legislators did not specify in the state budget how federal child care funds will be used, the PA Governor's Office and the Office of Childhood Development and Early Learning will have the power to determine how federal funds are spent. Start Strong PA continues to advocate for the priorities

we heard from parents and from providers. As a parent, [you can sign up to be a Start Strong PA supporter!](#)

Helpful Resources for Parents

- Check out this overview [fact sheet](#) of the Thriving PA campaign.
 - Here are two new fact sheets highlighting what can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis through the WIC program and how we can stop the downward spiral of WIC participation in recent years.
 - [Learning from the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
 - [Stopping WIC's Downward Spiral](#)
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Questions about anything you read here? Please contact Kristen Rotz, info@uwp.org

